UNITED NATIONS

# WORLD CHRONICLE

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Thalif Deen, Inter Press Service

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## UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), discusses her agency's efforts in assisting countries -- especially the most populated -- in taking more practical steps to tackle the problem of population growth. According to Dr. Sadik, by the end of this century 90 per cent of the world's population growth will be in the developing countries, with 50 per cent of the population living in urban centres. Regarding China's extreme population control measures, UNFPA has suggested that China abandon its quota system of one child per couple in favour of more aggressive social and economic programmes to improve the status of women, which would lead to a more acceptable family planning approach. Dr. Sadik points out that, contrary to popular opinion, none of the major religions of the world except Catholicism prohibit the use of contraceptives for family planning purposes. Dr. Sadik confirms that these issues will be on the agenda of next year's International Conference on Population and Development.

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**ANNOUNCER:** From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is WORLD CHRONICLE, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's WORLD CHRONICLE.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is WORLD CHRONICLE.

By the end of this century, the population of the world is expected to exceed 6 billion people. Growing faster than ever before, the population is exploding in many developing countries. Continued rapid growth has set humanity on a collision course with the resources required to sustain it -- yet one more threat to the global environment. These increasing numbers have placed additional strains on land, air and water resources, potentially threatening the survival of future generations. What can be done to contain the world's population growth?

Our guest today heads a leading United Nations agency concerned with population matters. She is Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, or UNFPA. A national of Pakistan, Dr. Sadik will be interviewed here at United Nations headquarters in New York by Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London, Peter Spielmann of The Associated Press, and Thalif Deen of Inter Press Service.

Before we talk with Dr. Sadik, let's look at one country's efforts to tackle the problem of rapid population growth. Our senior correspondent Steve Whitehouse reports.

**NARRATION:**
The population of the Arab Republic of Yemen is increasing at 3.1 per cent a year. It means the country's 12 million people will double in less than two decades. It's a challenge to the economic and social development of the nation. To strike a balance between population growth and development, the government, with the blessing of the country's religious leaders, has introduced a voluntary family planning programme.

**MANSURAH: (In Arabic)**
"Slowly, by lectures, meetings with religious and educational leaders, and through radio and TV, a[illegible] by nurses and midwives talking to groups of people at all levels, we have succeeded, somehow, in convincing people that contraceptives are not religiously forbidden."

READEX
FICHE

**NARRATION:**
With assistance from the government and the United Nations Population Fund, the Yemeni Family Care Association was established in 1976. It provides a wide range of services to mothers and children as well as expectant mothers. Women in this traditional Muslim society find family care beneficial for both mothers and children.

Infants like Akram Ali, a month and a half old, are brought to the centre for routine checkups and inoculations. An accurate record is kept to determine what shots are still to be given in the future. The centre provides pregnant women with essential pre-natal services. Nouria Jouri is pregnant and in her 7th month. A regular visit to the centre assures her that everything is fine.

The centre also serves as a focal point for family planning. Information on birth control is made available. The use of contraceptives is discussed in detail. Both husbands and wives are informed of the best device they should use.

Realizing the virtues of birth spacing, young mothers are now eager to use birth control. These are services which were not widely available just a few years ago. Rapid population increase puts a brake on progress. Therefore, family planning that respects local religious traditions is an important component in Yemen's development policy.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Dr. Sadik, we've just seen an interesting report on family planning in an relatively small country. China, of course, is the country which has the world's largest population, I think around a billion or more now. And its family planning programmes have been the subject of some controversy, particularly in the area of involuntary abortions and controlling the size of families to, what is it, one or two children maximum?

**SADIK:** One.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** One child. What is UNFPA doing in China?

**SADIK:** We have had a programme in China since 1980. We have helped them in many areas which they, in fact, didn't know much about. First is the area of contraceptive technology. They used technology which was really outdated and ineffective, and also harmful in some ways: for example, the steel ring IUD. So we've helped them to improve their quality of contraceptives by helping them with their

production and transferring women and men from these poor quality [contraceptives] to the modern and the better quality. This has helped to reduce the high rate of abortion and also the incidence of contraceptive failure.

We've also helped them with proper counselling and information dissemination and education methods. The Chinese, when they started in the '80s, didn't know how to really counsel, how to set up a good service programme, what kinds of follow-up were required. So those were the kinds of things that we did initially. Of course, we also helped them with the first modern census in the '80s.

Our current programme, which started in 1989, has tried to focus on what we call the 300 poorest counties, where the social indicators, such as literacy for women, maternal mortality, infant mortality, participation of women in employment, are much lower. They're all much lower than the national average. And this is one of the largest programmes we have there. It's in collaboration with UNICEF, but also there are some contributions from other UN organizations. And this combines literacy and vocational income-generating activities for women with the health, education, maternal child health and family planning services. And I think this programme is doing exceptionally well.

We are now suggesting to the Chinese Government that they should get away from the one child policy and, which they say is in fact a slogan, because up to this new data that's come out -- which has been the subject of some discussion in the present -- the size of the family in China was really 2.3, and in many parts of the country, they had number of children was more than two, three and four. And to move to a -- to get away from this one child policy, to get away from targets and quotas, and to just have high quality services, good technology together with a good integrated programme. And we're in discussion on these, and I think that the Chinese are going to agree, I hope, with that approach.

So we've been advising them on how to get to the same results with quality, with investment in people, and the kinds of things in fact that they did before 1980, which already resulted in a very sharp decline in fertility and use of family planning.

**DERGHAM:** I read recently that a woman in China killed her three daughters in order to be able to bear a male child. Now, apparently this is probably as a result of the quotas. Do you feel guilty as an organization who's been urging birth control and population control when such things happen? And particularly that further in south

Asia there's that girl child problem, where because the male child is preferable, there is a lot of discrimination against the female child.

**SADIK:** Yes. Well, I think that you have to go to the basic issue here, that the value of women is much lower than the value of boys or men. And what we need to do, and what our programmes, and many other UN programmes are trying to do, is to address this value question. This is what governments are also trying to do. This very strong male preference has so many reasons, I mean, it's -- I think it probably started historically when men were needed to fight wars and so on. But culture, tradition, religions have preserved it. For example, in the Hindu religion you need a male heir in order to fulfil or complete the burial ceremony, and so on, you know, and this is just one example.

Son preference is quite a widespread phenomenon. And the example that you quote I don't know about, and of course I feel terrible, and we all feel terrible. Anyone who works in the area of advancement of women wants to do something and feels very angry about that. But I think we have to address the root cause. In the case of the Chinese, for example, since 1949 the Chinese Government, as a matter of social policy, has done a great deal to improve the status of women. And I think the status of women has improved. But, you know, 4,000, 5,000 years of a cultural attitude is not overturned as quickly or as soon as they say, or even in a space of 40 years. It's not totally overturned, it's still there in the psyche and in the mind.

In Pakistan, in India, in Thailand, in Korea -- and I'm sure there are many others -- we have now started, we've asked the United Nations to conduct a study on sex differentials in infant mortality and also to analyse the causes why. We have some preliminary idea, but this is -- there's going to be an expert group meeting to discuss this and to suggest some more analysis and study of this phenomenon. Some of the initial issues are such as when girls get ill they're not taken to the hospital, or they're taken much later. If there's a male child born after a female child, the male child is breast fed and the female child is not. I mean, there are so many other reasons, so it's not direct infanticide. But it's like much more love and nurturing and attention, nourishment to the male child compared to the female child, and therefore you get these sex differences.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Raghida, you have another question?

**DERGHAM:** I have a follow-up. Do you think -- I know you said that you have commissioned people to do a scientific study -- but initially, do you think that it's a

cultural phenomenon or does religion in fact play the ultimate role? And, in fact, basically what I'm trying to ask you is with which religion do you most difficulties in your work? Is it Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism? And how much -- ?

**SADIK:** As far as girls are concerned or as far as family planning is concerned?

**DERGHAM:** Both, if you would.

**SADIK:** Well, I think as far as the status of women is concerned, it's cultural. Of course, you can put religion as part of culture, but it's cultural in many different religions. I mean, it's in the Hindu religion, you know, in Pakistan in the Muslim religion, in the Buddhist religion, so it's in many different religions. As far as family planning is concerned, again, the only religion that has a specific position against contraception is the Catholic religion. In fact, no other religion has a specific position against modern methods of contraception. And we are finding increasingly that religion seems to be playing less and less as an important consideration if individuals have started to decide, or have decided, that they want to do something about either spacing or planning or ending their childbearing. And I'm saying this because of the situation in Latin America, where they are predominantly Catholic, and you see that the acceptance of family planning is increasing quite dramatically in the last five, six, seven years. Even though, you know, and abortion is still prevalent. Of course, that also shows a great demand for family planning.

In Islam, there are some conservative groups of leaders, religious leaders, who have a position about contraception, but in all of the Muslim countries, family planning is being accepted. Indonesia, of course, is very well known, but Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt now, Jordan -- you know, Jordan has some other political considerations, but family planning has been accepted for spacing, for the health of the mother, for the health of the children. You saw the clip on Yemen. You know, I think we are quite surprised at the demand for family planning in Yemen.

So I would say that religion has a place, and I think it would be helpful if all religions endorsed the idea of responsible parenthood and of access and information for the health and protection of the lives of infants and mothers, but even without that endorsement, individuals seem to behave in a rational way to do what is best for their personal health and the future of their children.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** The programme is World Chronicle. Our guest is Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund. Peter Spielmann.

**SPIELMANN:** Dr. Sadik, your staff has been involved in birth control programmes in China since about 1980. Now you say you're trying to encourage the Chinese to get away from quotas and work more in terms of education and voluntary goals. Your staff certainly should be aware of whether there was coercion employed in pursuing the one child policy there. Did the Chinese in fact coerce large members of their population to reduce the birth rates?

**SADIK:** No. I think that as far as the Chinese policy is concerned, it's totally voluntary, and they have confirmed this in writing, in public statements, in public speeches. They have also accepted the fact that there is what they call an unsatisfactory performance by family planning workers in some of the counties, and that they have taken action against them, which in their situation is like re-educating and so on. So both of these things they acknowledge themselves, and they say themselves that many of the reports that you see or hear about come from their own sources. They come from Chinese sources and they're published in the Chinese press. What we are discussing with them is how to avoid the circumstances in which these things happen. One of the things, of course, is to continue to push for improving the status of women and girls, and I think there the Chinese are launching an even more extensive educational programme on the importance of the one girl as equal to one boy, or more important, and they've put some incentives in place, for example, women workers getting preference in housing and so on.

The other thing -- and this is not just particular to China, we've recommended this to India, to Indonesia, to Bangladesh -- not to have targets for family planning workers. I think you can have a national policy which is a policy that everyone knows the country aspires to, but then to give quotas to individual workers I think results in abuse and also misinformation, over-reporting. So, in fact, it's not a very successful way to implement a programme. You have to have good quality, and you have to give incentives to workers and give them the tools to do the guidance, to provide the information and to provide the good services.

And that is what we are trying to persuade the Chinese to understand, that it's not quotas and targets that will deliver, but rather the good quality services. In fact, I'm just sending another mission to China next month, in June, to further negotiate and discuss with them many of these issues that arise from reports, not from the reports in press here, but from reports that we get from them themselves. They've also set up, for example, at our suggestion, a monitoring unit in the State Family Planning Commission,

and whenever there is a report of coercion of any kind, then they send out an investigation team to investigate and take appropriate action.

So, as a UN organization, we are trying to do whatever we can, and I have to say that as long as the Chinese respond and listen, I think we feel that we are making an impact.

**DEEN:** Dr. Sadik, I'd like to focus on a more philosophical question. There is a theory that is fast gaining ground in the international community that some of the major socioeconomic problems in the world are caused not so much by over-population in the south but over-consumption in the north. The argument is that there are plenty of economic resources to go around but they are not being equitably shared. How valid is this theory?

**SADIK:** I'm not sure that economic resources are that many to go around, but I think the theory is only -- or the statement is made about use of natural resources and the pollution of the environment, that one person in the United States is equivalent to 20 persons or whatever in the developing world, and I think that is accepted by the industrialized countries themselves. And you see all of the UN recommendations on population resources and environment are always very balanced. What is being stated there is that the industrialized countries are over consuming, and their technology has contributed a great deal to the global environmental problem, and therefore they need to do something about that.

On the other side, when you look at the population of the developing world, like almost 77, let's say 80 per cent of the world lives in the developing regions. And all the increases that are going to take place between now and the next century, 95, 96, maybe even 98 per cent will take place in the developing world. So if the population today of five and a half billion becomes 10 billion, most of that will be in the developing world. And if you look at the aspirations of the people in the developing world, if they want to become like the people in the developed world, I think that's just not sustainable. It's not sustainable not just for the world, but it's not sustainable for the individual countries themselves, because they also have to look at their own natural resource base.

So what is being suggested -- and I think developing countries accept this very well now -- is that the individual developing countries should look at their rate of growth in relation to their own prospects for socioeconomic development and the use of their own natural resources. There has to be a shift in balance, and I think everyone has

accepted that, but the developing world which has the potential for these huge numbers must also look at what development strategies they intend to follow.

I think they have to learn, or we all have to learn, from the experiences of the present and of the past. I think the argument or the debate which goes into, well, you know, so and so did that in the past, and they did this, and now they're stopping us, doesn't really -- it is a losing argument for everybody. Nobody wins in that. I think what we have to say here is this is where we are today, and what can we expect to have for all of our people, all the individuals in the world, to have a standard of living which we as individuals will feel proud of and not embarrassed and ashamed, as we are today, I think, with the levels of poverty that exist in the developing world. And I think that is something that has to be discussed by developing and developed countries together. And I think this artificial divide, when we get into these confrontational, polemical and political discussions, is in my view not very helpful. And I'm saying this because we are discussing this in connection with the Population Conference, and I'm very pleased with the collegial way in which the discussions have taken place in our prep com, in the preparatory committee processes on these issues.

So it's not a question of blaming one or the other. I think what we are looking at is how can every individual in the world get to a standard of living which is what we would desire -- health, education, and the opportunity to find employment and generate income for themselves. And to do that, I think there has to be a realignment of resources and use of economic resources, the natural resources, a more collegial relationship between all groups of countries.

**DERGHAM:** Permit me to raise with you a particular issue that probably after the cold war has intensified: there is a problem of migration. Now I read that there are about 17 million people from developing countries currently living in the developed countries -- some are working legally, some illegally. And of course we hear about discrimination measures against these people from the developing countries. Now, what do you do about this sort of thing, this migration that of course is the consequence of new political developments that -- you have to show us more of that. What do you do? How do you bring about that gap that my colleague was trying to address with you?

**SADIK:** I think migration has two basic causes. One is simply people in search of employment and better economic opportunities. And another group is qualified and is desired, and therefore they are desired by countries or industries, and so on, who are then attracted to go to these jobs. In developing countries themselves now, there is a big

move, shift of populations from the rural to urban areas. In fact, by the year 2000, that will be a landmark, because more than 50 per cent of the world will live in urban centres, and the largest increases are going to be in Africa. That movement from rural to urban is not, as has been in the past, that the urban centres have generated employment and therefore they're attracting people from the rural areas. It's not the pull factor, it's really the push factor, where the natural resources are getting diluted and depleted, and the land is not able to sustain people, so they're being pushed out of the rural areas. So the first thing I think that one has to look at is what can we do to prevent that. And I think addressing population growth is one of the elements that needs to be addressed there.

The second thing that has to be done in developing countries themselves is to look at their development strategies. You know, there has been a tendency, which is I think hopefully changing, to have very centralized development strategies. The urban centres get a lot of the investment, and the rural or rural-related areas do not, and therefore you see that the development of small or medium sized cities has not really taken place, particularly in Latin America, but you see the phenomenon also now repeating itself in some parts of Africa. And I think that's something now that planners and governments have to give some attention to.

Then finally, of course, people move out from their own countries to other countries. And in fact, what is not known is that there are more people living in the developing countries outside their country of birth. For example, I think we have estimates something like 40 million Africans are living in countries other than their country, and they're just seeking employment opportunities. And then of course some number of them go from the south to the north. And we've had some discussions in preparation for the International Conference on International Migration, and I think that the recommendations that will probably be presented are that international migration has to be addressed in two ways. One is to address the causes of the movement, because generally most people don't want to leave their countries for employment, they would like to have the employment, and therefore the first question that was being asked on this shift of resource balance and economic opportunities, I think that will start to take place. I think the industrialized countries have started to realize that, that there has to be some shifting. And I think whatever the reason migration is one of the factors that is going to attract . . .

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Dr. Sadik, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of WORLD CHRONICLE.

Our guest has been Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund. She was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Raghida Dergham of *Al-Hayat* of London, Peter Spielmann of The Associated Press, and Thalif Deen of Inter Press Service.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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